

# SNEAK PREVIEW

# THE STAR TREK LIFT-OFF ...and how Mr Spock almost missed it

The starship Enterprise came out of dry-dock for "Star Trek," the most awaited space epic since "Star Wars" and nearly left Mr Spock behind

Though it might horrify legions of "Star Trek" fans, Paramount Pictures did consider making a "Star Trek" movie without Mr Spock. To a reporter's shocked "but they couldn't do that," Leonard Nimoy responds with a rumbling laugh and a calmly positive "Oh yes they could."

Admittedly, he concedes: "There might have been a lot of people who would have been unhappy about it. But that doesn't mean they couldn't do it."

Nimoy is happy, however, that things turned out the way they did: That "Star Trek — The Motion Picture" has been made, with the original cast intact, and is

being released worldwide this month. "I think I would have been terribly uncomfortable if it had been made without Spock and without me playing Spock," he says, which seems to discount his alleged dislike for the role.

It's not that Nimoy didn't like Mr Spock and never has been. What bothered him, at times, was being typecast in the role not by fans so much as by people in his own business.

First planned as a two-hour television movie, the script originally excluded Spock because, at the time, Nimoy was playing a role in "Equus" on Broadway.

Consequently, "There were some painful times when we were making this picture," he says. "It was particularly volatile in my case because the Spock character was being written as we went along."

But that's the way it is with all his careers, Leonard says. A man of many talents, he lectures and writes (he has produced an autobiography called "I am not Spock" and two books of poetry in

recent years) as well as acting in television, movies, and on stage. Each venture has its ups and downs.

Nimoy wrote, produced and starred in a one-man show called "Vincent," the story of Vincent Van Gogh, as told by his brother, Theo. Van Gogh and Spock have more in common than odd things about their ears (Spock is famous for pointed ears, Van Gogh cut one of his off), Nimoy says. They are both, in a sense, aliens and he identifies with each of them.

"I do identify with alienated characters," he says. "I have played aliens ever since I was a teenager. I don't know why but I really am, in a way, an alienated character myself. I have managed to make adjustments so that I can function socially but in a way I still am . . . alien."

Leonard didn't expect that "Star Trek" would bring him such attention. While studio executives for the original TV series were still saying "get rid of the guy with the funny ears" and producer Gene Roddenberry was having a hard





time convincing them that "Star Trek" would work, the stars could hardly expect the adulation that soon followed. In fact, Leonard Nimoy's phone number was still listed in the West Los Angeles phone book when the TV series first went to air.

"I was just doing a job. I wasn't concerned with the public impact," Leonard says now. "The show went on the air on a Thursday night and the next night the phone started ringing . . . kids had found the number in the book. So that was the first step . . . change the phone number and get an unlisted one."

But in the end the fame became so intense that Macy's department store in New York refused to have him for a personal appearance because they couldn't cope with the security problem.

Like all the other actors from the TV series, Nimoy is grateful for the interest of "Star Trek" fans, the so-called "Trekkies" who wouldn't let the series die, who have held conventions all over the world since the series became a

casualty of the ratings system in 1969 and who are now, no doubt, breathlessly awaiting the movie.

In Hollywood, where strange things happen all the time, the "Star Trek" story is a phenomenon. The series was cancelled after three years because of poor ratings but the Trekkies wouldn't let it die. They have gathered in numbers of up to 32,000 at conventions and members of the cult include scientists, professors, librarians and many other educated types not usually associated with fan clubs.

Nichelle Nichols, who plays Uhura, speculated recently that the appeal of "Star Trek" was that it placed real people, with real needs and fears and fantasies, in the future. Gene Roddenberry, the producer, thinks the slogan of the movie might be a key. It says "The Human Adventure Might Is Just Beginning." What it stresses, says Roddenberry, is that there is a future, that the doomsdayers who predict that the world is finished are way off beam.

**The starship Enterprise and (inset) its command crew: (from left) Leonard Nimoy, De Forest Kelly and new members Stephen Collins and Persis Khambatta. Seated is William Shatner.**

Probably the only member of the group who isn't giddy with optimism about the movie is Leonard Nimoy. Neither a Pollyanna optimist nor a pessimist, he's the realist saying he will let his agents worry about what he's going to be doing after the movie.

"The actors are going to be secondary anyway," he says. "It's a producer's and director's picture more than an actor's picture. But it should work well. We have the best people in the world working on it."

"I don't fantasize," he continues, sounding more and more like the supremely logical Mr. Spock. "I don't daydream about the future or what is going to happen tomorrow. I just hope I get some time off."

— SUE RHODES